

Trinity

I have always loved the festival of Trinity Sunday. This, I believe, is unusual in ministers as many quake in their boots as to how to try and give a sermon on this great theological mystery – God is three but one and one but three, undivided yet different, unique and yet one and the same.

Many illustrations have been used down the ages: clover leaves; three states of water (ice, liquid, steam); my own personal favourite of the candle and (one I have just come across that Sonia might like) a threefold musical cord. Three distinct notes making one unified sound.

There is, of course, always a flaw in any illustration; how can any created thing, no matter how wonderful, give full credit to the being that created it? It's something akin to trying to get babies to understand the complexity of the universe using building blocks. Now I know Lego is cool but the cosmos it is not! (Matthew may disagree with that point of view)

And, while we are on the theme of the Universe; as vast, complex and wondrous as this universe we exist in is, it is but a fraction of our creator's limitless power. It is but one of many universes and dimensions – science is freaky! (Here's another illustration for you – God [Father] designs/imagines – God [Son] creates/makes – God [Spirit] maintains/sustains.)

Perhaps the greatest wonder of all is why, this being, wants us to know him at all? Yet he does! Throughout humanities existence God has revealed himself to us both directly – Jesus – and indirectly.

Human beings have always been aware of that something 'other' that was greater than ourselves and the world that we saw around us. It is why they made cave paintings, honoured their dead and built henges in the landscape. We sought God and time and again God has reached out to us. It is through this reaching out that the church finally came up with a way to describe the indescribable and came up with the word Trinity – tri unity, tri = three, unity = one, and then settled back to write libraries of books and essays to attempt to define the word they had invented!

And it is this being, this indescribable being, that we have to invent words for, that allows us the honour of calling him Father!

Which brings me back to what I said before; no matter what illustration we use to attempt to describe God it just isn't enough – and never will be. It's no wonder generations of ministers have quivered in their beds the night before Trinity Sunday.

Why then do I like it so much?

I think I like it for that very reason! Trinity Sunday forces us to acknowledge that God is beyond our ability to fully grasp; it dares us to attempt to put God in a safe box and laughs at our ridiculous efforts. Trinity Sunday demands that we open our brains and blow away the cobwebs of our assumptions.

In Christ we have been privileged to have God reveal himself directly to us in a way that our poor little brains and fragile hearts can cope with; and I thank God most humbly and gratefully for that. But that comes with a cost; because God has made himself accessible and approachable we, too often, forget the honour of such a gift. We take our privilege for granted and forget how we once only approached God in fear and trembling.

Don't get me wrong, I do not think we should tremble before God (that would undo all that he has taken a great deal of trouble to do in the first place) BUT I do think that it does us good to remember how far God has lifted us up. After all, if you do not recognise the wonder of the gift, how can you be truly grateful for it?

The recommended psalm for today is number 8, go and have a look at it; or, if you are looking for something a little more challenging, try the last couple of chapters of Job (just before the psalms). Our predecessors were fully aware of their reliance on God, and our comparative insignificance, and so they gave God the honour and glory they knew he was owed. They could only dream of the relationship we have and forget to give thanks for. Hmmm – a hymn has come to mind.

For myself though there is one description of God that answers all questions and one that we can rely on and take comfort in. It is a description that could fill libraries but, paradoxically, even a child knows instinctively the meaning of. It is a description taken from the First letter of John who knew a thing or two about how to use words. It is simply and marvellously this:

God is love.

And in the end, that is all we need to know.

Thank you Lord God that in your majesty you have stooped to embrace us; that through Your Son you have walked with us and saved us; that through Your Spirit we may know you and be guided by you; and that in Your Unity you have loved us. May we be ever mindful of all that we owe and love you in return. Amen.

Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done,
in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
hath blest us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world in the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son and him who reigns,
with them in highest heaven
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.